DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 635 FL 009 227

AUTHOR Wang, John B.
TITLE Language and Ideology.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 7p.
JOURNAL CIT MALT Bulletin; v23 n1 p5-10 Win 1978

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Chinese; Chinese Culture; *Communism; Diachronic Linguistics; *Language Planning; *Language Variation; Mandarin Chinese; National Programs; *Official Languages; Phonology; Policy Formation; *Political Influences; Public Policy; Sino Tibetan Languages; Sociolinguistics; Syntax; Vocabulary
IDENTIFIERS *China; Putonghua

ABSTRACT

Language must meet the social, economic, political, and psychological needs of the time, and it necessarily changes with new ways of thinking. Political ideology is one factor that can influence linguistic change. A dramatic example of this process can be found in the People's Republic of China, where major political forces have brought about drastic linguistic reform. This includes the creation of a new language, Putonghua, which is a composite of Mandarin syntax, Pekingese pronunciation and leftist vocabulary. Perhaps the most ambitious project in the reform movement is the simplification of the Chinese character system, which involves reduction of strokes, simplification of phonetic components, and the elimination of characters by using simpler homophones. A third strategy consists of the creation of a national phonetic alphabet known as "pinyin." In addition, practically all terms associated with pre-revolutionary China have disappeared, and new terms and slogans have taken their place. Phrases which have been retained have undergone a change in meaning to reflect revolutionary ideology. (AM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED149635

LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGY

Since language is an instrument to exchange thoughts and is directly linked with thinking, it necessarily changes in conformity with new ways and new patterns of thinking. Furthermore, language is a means of social communication. As society changes, language must change too. Language reflects the reality of our society; in effect, it reflects the conditions under which we live. When new inventions come on the scene, new words are invented to denote them. When new social institutions are born, need is born too for new terms and expressions. Language, in short, is a living organism, and it follows laws of growth and decay. Lexicon and pet phrases outgrow themselves with age, fall into disuse, and give way to new ones. We have read and seen how the linguistic features of classical, renaissance, romantic and modernist phenomena appear and disappear. We know how Old Spanish, French and German differ from the modern and current languages in use. Language must meet the social, economic, political, scientific and psychological needs of the time.

In this paper I intend to show how political ideology can influence, and indeed can even sway and direct the linguistic changes of a language, taking the case of the People's Republic of China as an illustration. It is a rare and a unique case. And I am in an advantageous position to document it. I lived in the old, traditional and Confucian society with its millenial mores and customs, ceremonious gestures and refined expressions. I was trained and hence am thoroughly familiar with the rubrics of social intercourse. Twenty-eight years later, I went back to the same land, but discovered a new face, and found a new society with new customs, new values, new ways of thinking and hence also a new language. The contrast struck me with all its might and vividness.

In undertaking this task, I am fully aware of the difficulties involved. Such difficulties do not rise from the subject matter itself, but rather from the ingenuity, inspiration and perhaps luck needed for hitting upon felicitous ways and terms to convey the understanding of such changes to a reader who is unfamiliar with both the old and new Chinese language. Examples in these cases are essential, but of little or no help, if they are quoted in Chinese. I can only do what is feasible, that is, to state general principles and seek examples in English to enlighten points in Chinese in a macaronic fashion. I'd like to toast to the success of this adventure.

FL009227

Creation of a Common Language

In new socialist China the linguistic changes are moved by three major forces, which all are political in nature. They are the communist doctrine, the use of language as a socio-political tool, and the new social values originated from new modes of thinking.

China was linguistically divided. It had and it still has, besides Mandarin, seven major dialects within the Han language family, which are Wu, Xiang, Gan, Hakka, Northern Min, Southern Min, and Cantonese. Among the Non-Han people, fifty-four national minorities have been officially

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
The MALT Bulletin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

recognized, each with at least one language. Communications between people of different regions have been thorny. Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the government has decided to unify the country linguistically, not by eliminating the various dialects but by creating and promoting a new common language for all the citizens of China.

This new language, known as Putonghua, was formed promptly adopting the Peking pronunciation as its standard phonetics, the structures of the northern Mandarin as its syntax, and the contemporary leftist writers as well as regional colloquialism as sources of its vocabulary. The reasons for these choices are that Peking has been the center of culture, north China spoke the best Mandarin, and Chairman Mao thought the common people's speech rich, vigorous, vivid and expressive, while the parlance of the educated officialdom was bookish and decadent. Today Putonghua is taught in every school of PRC, and cadres have been instructed to use it always in their official capacity. As many times in the past, language is believed to be a powerful tool of conquest by the Chinese authorities.

The Chinese of different regions and provinces are not only expected to be able to communicate vocally, but everybody ought to be able to read and write. Everyone should read and study and discuss the communications and directives from the central government. All must familiarize themselves with Chairman Mao's teachings. Hence, the feverish campaign against illiteracy. Here I am not saying that to teach people to read and write is solely to make them good communists or socialists, for analphabetism in modern times is simply inexcusable and intolerable. But I do believe that in PRC the vigorous campaign to fight illiteracy has a strong dose of political overtones.

The Simplification of Characters

This campaign has prompted numerous linguistic changes, among which the most outstanding is the simplification of the Chinese characters. It was deemed that the Chinese language has too many characters. Many are useless or at least redundant. Many characters have too many strokes. Many have odd shapes. Many are difficult to use, to recognize and to remember. All these are obstacles to effective and easy learning for the common folk. Therefore it was decided to eliminate some characters and to simplify many others.

Once the green light was given, the people became a moving force. Out of practical need, people spontaneously created simplified forms, used them in wall posters or circulated them among friends for experiments and tests. To prevent the situation from becoming chaotic, the Committee on Language Reform periodically collects the simplified characters, studies them, analyzes them, and after the process of approving and disapproving, adopting and rejecting, officially publishes the final list. Thus, in 1956 a list of 515 simplified characters was published. And the list published in 1964 included 2238 modified forms.

Even today the process of simplification is going on. Every year one encounters new forms of old words. Generally speaking, the simplification of Chinese characters functions within three broad categories:

1. *Reduction of strokes performed mainly on complicated characters.* Following this principle some parts of the characters have been dropped, complex lines substituted by simpler ones, intricate patterns by more manifest ones, several dots by one line and so forth. There are no exact English counterparts to this kind of operation. One can think perhaps of writing *thru* for through. The kind of abbreviation often used commercially in America is also similar: *U-Haul* for English "you haul," and *Par-T-Pak* read as "party pack." This should help to make characters easier to memorize, to write and to read. Many Chinese characters have been simplified in this way.

2. *Simplification of the phonetic components.* Regarding the origin or the composition of Chinese characters, the philologists see four species. Some characters are pictographs, that is, they resemble a picture of the meaning of the word, or at least originated that way. Others are logographs, in which a single symbol represents or indicates an idea as expressed in speech. Still others are termed as logical aggregates, i.e., compound characters whose signification comes from the compounded parts (e.g. television, wristwatch, in English). A fourth class, known as phonetic complexes, are characters made with two or more simpler characters, one of which gives the meaning, the rest a clue for pronunciation. It is believed that up to seventy-five per cent of the Chinese characters are phonetic complexes. So when the movement for simplification started, the surgical scalpel pointed immediately in that direction. The goal was to replace complicated phonetic parts with simpler ones. It is next to impossible to find English equivalents or examples to document this operation. One might want to consider, as roughly comparable, *u-city* for university city (pronounced in full), or *g-store*, for grocery store. Another example is *Xmas*, read as Christmas. Nevertheless, this is not really what is being done in Chinese. It suffices to say that this principle of simplification is widely used and is found very useful to facilitate the learning process.

3. *Elimination of Chinese characters by using simpler homophones.* Because of the scarcity of different sounds, many Chinese characters are pronounced identically. That is to say that in Chinese there are many many homonyms, words with the same pronunciation but different meaning. The campaign for simplification of the Chinese language took the bold and daring step to rid many homophonous characters and to replace them with one character, which of course did not originally have the meanings of the words replaced. In agreement with this device one may use *to* for to, too and two, *we* for we and wee, *ware* for ware, wear, and maybe where.

This is indeed a foolhardy ruse, which many scholars would frown on and detest. But it is adopted and used in the simplification procedure. By doing this, in January of 1956, twenty-nine characters were abolished. And there are people who are planning on reducing the 10,000 distinct characters found on the typesetting section in a printing house to 3,000. The aim is to achieve the most by using the least.

I should not omit mentioning that political ideology in China has also prompted the creation of a national phonetic alphabet known as pinyin. It is a script international in nature, that is being used widely by the

minority nationalities. Four nationalities, i.e., Uighur, Ingpo, Kazakh and Lahu, have replaced their traditional writing system by one based on pinyin. And ten orthographies based on pinyin have been created for previously unwritten languages. This is linguistically exciting. China's main purpose is of course national unity and communication. One sees clearly that again the political ideology is the moving force of these linguistic activities.

Changes in Vocabulary and Expressions

Besides the simplification of characters, effort has been made to narrow the gap between the written and the spoken language. Traditionally there has been a huge distance between the elegant, elliptical, obscure and abstruse literary language written by scholars often after many years of study of the Chinese Classics, and the everyday colloquial plain speech. Even those who could read frequently failed to understand the literary Chinese. Now the citizens are expected to read the press, familiarize themselves with the stages of revolution and follow the direction of the latest struggle. They are to use the same socialist and revolutionary terms and expressions in their daily conversation. As a result, the writers came down and the readers went up. And a mutual rapprochement is taking place.

Linguistic alterations motivated by ideological reasons in the People's Republic of China have been extremely complex. Besides the creation of Putonghua and the simplification of characters indicated above, I shall now discuss briefly the abandonment of lexical items and expressions, the birth of new terms and slogans, and semantic changes in existing vocabulary. My intention is simply to outline a phenomenon and to show how ideology can manipulate and fashion the nature of a language.

1. *Disappearance of lexical items and expressions.* The new socialist China killed a great deal of the old customs and habits. It has brought new ideas, new beliefs and new values. And the death of the old society took with it the linguistic expressions adherent to it. Anything that sounded excessively ceremonious, sanctimonious, bourgeois or aristocratic could no longer be tolerated under the present social system.

To ask one's name, for instance, a well mannered person would say, "What's your honorable surname?"; to ask where one lived, "Where is your honorable mansion?"; and to ask how old one was, "What is your honorable age?" In present China such expressions are held in ridicule. By the same token, many professional, military and social titles have been abandoned and replaced by terms indicating service or revolution. "Governor" is now "Chairman of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee," and "Mayor," "Chairman of the City Revolutionary Committee." Captain Wong may be addressed as Comrade Wong. Heads and Chiefs of many departments became Managers and Secretaries.

Communism avowedly believes in equalitarianism and the dignity of the working mass. It attributes no distinction to manual labor and intellectual work. Both are equally dignified. Therefore it banned all the words tinged with the sapor of oppression, degradation, inferiority or contempt. Accordingly the traditional Chinese terms for cook, peasant, mailman,

attendant, maid, servant, coolie, waiter, animal taker, etc., have all changed. One no longer hears words and expressions regarding gambling, prostitution, opium smoking, pawning or loitering, which were so popular in the past. As a matter of fact, even the discussion on medical cost, education expenses (bogies in American society), tipping, selling or buying real estate, and seeking employment, became meaningless. Such topics have become non-entities.

In short, practically all terms with objectionable ideological or political implications or with a feudalistic or bourgeois scent have either fallen into disrepute and are hence used with caution or strictly tabooed.

2. *New terms and slogans.* When one travels through the People's Republic of China, one hears many new expressions which did not exist before 1949. Most of them have to do with revolution and the status of the present society. By way of examples one may mention the iron girl, the iron man, the Tachin spirit, barefoot doctors, and the communes; the great leap forward, the cultural revolution, the game of four, cadres, work point, self-criticism, self-reliance, and enemies of the people; the three mountains (imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism); let the hundred flowers bloom; let the past serve the present; the five guarantees (food, shelter, clothes, transportation and education), the three honesties (be an honest man, say honest words, and do honest things); workshops, boiler, work days; the four olds (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits), the three divorces in teaching (theory divorced from practice, classroom teaching divorced from society, and teaching divorced from learning); the red guards, the May 7th schools, productive forces, dig deeply, store abundantly and never seek hegemony. One can almost go on ad infinitum. Many of these expressions became part of the vocabulary in daily life. New ideology demanded the creation of new terms and expressions.

3. *Semantic changes.* Due to changes of ideological outlook, some of the historical events and word contents in the PRC have assumed new interpretations. Many traditional bandits in Chinese history have now become heroes, and heroes, villains. Rebellions are now uprisings. Moral and ethical teachings that have been revered throughout the ages are today considered reactionary manacles to social progress. Even Confucius himself, the Sage and Master, is being challenged. History has been re-examined, and historical happenings re-classified.

All human and historical affairs are interpreted within the framework of Marxism. To be a poor uneducated peasant was a shame. Now it is something to be proud of. Wealth and land-holding was a sign of heavenly blessing. It is now something to be ashamed of. Universal love was an ideal. But now people are taught to hate the enemies of the class. Communist ideology has made good things bad and bad things good. It has also modified and redirected the meaning of many terms. Relatives, family, friends, children and so forth have extended their scope to comrades in arms.

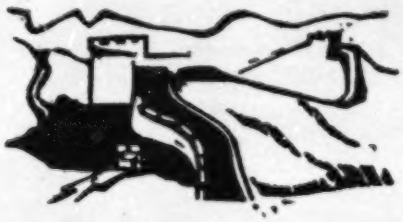
By the same token, to love, to be close to, to be a good provider have also assumed social content. Military terms such as to fight, to struggle, to march, to advance, are applied to production. "A spark may burn the whole plain" was a sign of warning to campers and picnickers. Now it is

used to denote the might and force of revolution. Liberation is now a synonym of the Communist take-over and the foundation of the People's Republic of China. And the present academic policy has made "to go out" to mean the practice of the students leaving the classroom in order to partake in manual labors in the field. And "to invite in" has come to indicate the act of bringing in experienced albeit uneducated workers to lecture in the classrooms. The frequently used words "to criticize" now mean to discuss. "To study" has nearly disappeared. The scholastic activity is expressed by words such as to learn or to learn and to practice.

Here again, one can cite many more examples. The examples given, however, are sufficient to demonstrate that ideology has made and is still making semantic changes in the People's Republic of China.

To conclude, one may argue against the universal applicability of the "Chinese phenomenon." One may question whether, given the same or similar politico-social changes in a nation, similar linguistic changes would take place. Whatever the case may be, one cannot seriously doubt that radical and dramatic changes of a society, such as changes from democracy to communism, will necessarily cause radical and dramatic changes in the language, which after all is a verbal and written expression of the invisible social reality.

John B. Wang
University of Montana



Deadline for

Spring *Bulletin* 1978:

MARCH 10